

[REDACTED] TALKS

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Agenda Item: I. 3.

SOVIET INTENTIONS AND WARNING OF SOVIET OR
WARSAW PACT ATTACK ON NATO

General

1. It remains a basic objective of Soviet policy to bring about the dissolution of the North Atlantic Alliance and thereby the exclusion of the United States military presence from Europe, and the Soviets will exploit any opportunities to further these ends.

Possible Forms of Deliberate Attack in the NATO Area

2. An attack could take a number of forms:

a. A surprise nuclear attack on Western Europe and North America resulting in general nuclear war.

b. A conventional attack against the Central Region mainly with forces already in the forward area but without prior mobilization.

c. A conventional attack against the Central Region with mobilization to fill out reinforcements brought from Western USSR.

d. A full-scale attack including the use of tactical nuclear weapons but not necessarily preceded by a strategic nuclear strike.

e. A local small-scale operation mounted by the Soviet Union, or by a Warsaw Pact country acting with the USSR's full knowledge and support which could, if necessary, be disowned.

~~CONFERENCE SECRET~~

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8(Rev. 1)

- 2 -

Other Possible Situations of Outbreak of Hostilities

3. War could grow out of miscalculation in circumstances not foreseen or desired by either side. Berlin remains an anomalous situation with potential for a crisis. The Soviets have not been prepared to risk nuclear war over Berlin in the past and it is difficult to foresee circumstances in which they would consider the problem of West Berlin to be so important to them that they would deliberately take such a risk in the future. Nonetheless, we regard a confrontation over Berlin at some time as quite possible, and as the most likely case in which miscalculation could lead to hostilities.

Political Background

4. Although the present Soviet leaders have not renounced the ultimate aim of the extension of communism throughout the world, they accept that the existence of the nuclear deterrent places strict limits on the extent and means by which they can attempt to extend their power, and their recent actions have been generally consistent with those aims which they publicly declare to have first priority in their external policies -- the prevention of world war and the creation of peaceful conditions for the development of their own and of other communist countries. They would avoid taking any action which they would believe would put in jeopardy the internal achievements and plans of their regime. This consideration is also of paramount importance to the leaders of the other countries within the Warsaw Pact.

5. In general, Soviet foreign policy over the past two years has been cautious; this restraint has been most pronounced in the actions of the Soviet Government in the European area. Their principal efforts have been elsewhere, in the underdeveloped world, where the limits to a more active policy are less circumscribed and in their attempt to restore unity within the world communist movement, for the leadership of which they are engaged in a bitter conflict with China. The Sino-Soviet rift is deep and unlikely to be resolved within the foreseeable future.

CONFERENCE SECRET

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8 (Rev. 1)

- 3 -

6. Meanwhile, and despite the war in Vietnam, the Soviet Government, and also the governments of their allies in the Warsaw Pact, have continued to maintain contacts in many fields with the West and to maintain limited political dialogue with NATO powers. Moreover, their economic plans involve to an increasing extent commercial and technological exchanges with the West. In addition, the Soviets have recently shown signs of wishing to reach limited agreements with the West in a number of fields. Moreover, the Soviet leaders have not responded to the urgings of the Chinese that they take actions in Europe which would cause the United States to be concerned for European security and inhibit its buildup in Vietnam.

7. Although it would require considerable movement in Soviet outlook and in the world situation to alter our present assessment, some change is possible. A change in the Soviet leadership, for example, followed by the emergence of a single leader with overriding powers, might bring about less predictable policies comparable to those followed by Khrushchev, possibly with less restraint. Even then, however, an actual Soviet attack in Europe would only be conceivable in circumstances in which the Soviet leaders were confident that it would not escalate and lead to the nuclear annihilation of the Soviet Union, and we do not see that situation as one in prospect for the Soviet leaders. On the other hand, over the long run the Soviets might come to believe that their enhanced strategic military posture as well as developments within the Western Alliance would in time permit more assertive pressures, and there is some risk of miscalculation.*

The Problem of Determining Soviet Intentions

8. In reaching a warning judgment, it is necessary to evaluate physical preparations and other activities in the context of the Soviet political posture. This context has

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████████ Representative would add: "Any hardening of Soviet policy would be apparent within a relatively short period and would provide clear warning of a return by the Soviet Government to high-risk policies with their consequent military implications. There is nothing at present to suggest that any such changes in Soviet policy are likely."

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8(Rev. 1)

-4-

to do with the state of affairs within the Soviet Union as well as the way the USSR is conducting its international affairs at the time: the vigor of its challenge to the West over various issues, the apparent degree of commitment of the Soviet leaders to various positions, and the political climate in high Soviet and East European circles. While the political context introduces vital evidence, it also adds complications to the warning problem. Soviet foreign policy initiatives, actions, and positions are themselves often difficult to interpret. For example, in September 1962, an assessment of the considerations that would deter Soviet policymakers from deploying offensive missiles to Cuba was both logical and erroneous. Nevertheless, evaluation of the political posture, ambiguous though it may be,* is a vital ingredient in the interpretation of military activities, particularly with respect to reaching judgments about the Soviet intentions they may signify.

9. It is evident from the foregoing considerations that warning is not likely to be either complete or unequivocal. The more indications collected and recognized, and the more comprehensive the picture of Soviet capabilities and behavior, the better would be the basis for judging the Soviet course of action. But the sum of the available indications and knowledge would almost certainly not be conclusive as to Soviet intentions. Therefore, even under the most favorable circumstances, it is likely that we could only arrive at a judgment that the probability of Soviet attack was high. Some indication of the form, scale, or time of attack might be ascertained from the character and pace of Soviet preparations, but here too there would be uncertainty.

10. Before initiating any form of deliberate attack the Soviet leaders would have to be convinced that the resulting military action would not bring United States strategic nuclear forces into play. They would have to conclude that the United

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████████ Representative reserves on phrase, "ambiguous though it may be."

CONFERENCE SECRET

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8(Rev. 1)

-5-

States no longer had the will to defend Europe, they might attempt to establish the basis for such a conclusion by mounting a series of pressures on Western positions, as they attempted to do during the Berlin crisis. The changes in the conduct of Soviet policy and in East-West relations would in this case become apparent; irrespective of uncertainty about ultimate Soviet intentions, there would probably be a situation of prolonged tension, alerting the West to an increased risk of war. This sort of situation would be likely to arise if there had been fundamental changes in the relationships of the Western powers such as might lead the Soviet Government to conclude that their pressures might be effective.

11. Thus, although the Soviets could engage in military harrassment without extensive preparation, it is hard to foresee circumstances in which they would be likely to launch an attack against the Central Region without some indications of political change first becoming visible.*

Military Warning

12. Political indications would at best give us only a general indication of a Soviet attack, and would be unlikely to provide conclusive evidence that a decision to attack had been made. It will always be difficult to interpret Soviet intentions purely from their military preparations, since they could equally well be precautions in anticipation of a Western attack, measures intended to intimidate the West or the prelude to Soviet attack. Furthermore some preparations might be disguised as large-scale training exercises.

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[REDACTED] Representative would add: "It is impossible to be precise about the length of warning we might get from these indications, but it would be likely to be measured at least in weeks rather than days." (The [REDACTED] would also add para. 11 with this footnote to the Conclusions. In that case, the US would add para. 9 to the Conclusions.)

25X1C8b

CONFERENCE SECRET

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8(Rev. 1)

-6-

13. If the Russians were prepared to forego strategic surprise in order to increase the weight of the attack, we would expect some warning (see FRG-UK-US footnote)* in the event of a buildup to an 80-division force. But if they decided on pre-emption or surprise attack, using only such forces as were readily available, we should be likely to receive little or no warning.

The Political Threat

14. The Soviets are likely to expect to obtain certain political effects from the size of their military strength. Even if they refrain indefinitely from the more obvious forms of military blackmail, even if they elect not to make any shows of force in connection with Berlin, they will nevertheless seek to exploit for political ends the very fact that the Soviet Union is a superpower and the Western European states are not.

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** Representative would add:

"Effects of NATO Force Reduction

"Reductions in NATO forces on the mainland of Europe would have no appreciable effect on the political or military warning of changes in Soviet intentions." (The ■ would also add this to the Conclusions.)

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US and ■ representatives to this working group do not comment on the matter raised by the ■ footnote because they believe it lies outside their terms of reference.

CONFERENCE SECRET

CONFERENCE SECRET
Doc/8(Rev. 1)

- 7 -

Conclusions

15. We conclude that under prevailing circumstances:

a. The Soviet leaders will not deliberately start a general war, since in a strategic nuclear exchange it would be impossible to prevent catastrophic damage to the Soviet Union.

b. Because of their appreciation of the risks of escalation to general war, the Soviet leaders are most unlikely deliberately to start a limited war in the NATO area.

16. We further conclude that:

a. A war between the Soviet Union and the West could result from miscalculation. We believe that this is unlikely and that the risks of miscalculation in the NATO area are low because great efforts will be exerted to avoid such miscalculation. Nevertheless, by definition "miscalculation" cannot be ruled out and we therefore regard this as the most probable cause of an outbreak of hostilities between the Soviets or the Warsaw Pact and NATO, if it was to occur in the foreseeable future.

b. More generally, Soviet political pressure, with growing military power in the background, may well be exerted against one or more members of the Alliance, particularly if the Soviets estimate that disarray and doubts about the credibility of the US strategic deterrent in certain circumstances had increased their capacity for political maneuver.

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